

Draft
Environmental Assessment

Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area
Agricultural Lease Renewals

August 2017



***Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks***

Draft Environmental Assessment

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** The proposed action calls for the renewal of six existing agricultural leases and one existing bee yard (apiary) lease for a 5-year period (2018-2023) on the Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area (CFWMA) near Townsend, MT.

2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:**

The CFWMA is on federal land administered by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) manages the CFWMA through a management agreement (No. R12MU60088, 2012) with BOR. MFWP is authorized to offer leases in return for cash payment (87-1-601, MCA) or in exchange for services provided by a lessee (87-1-209(7), MCA).

3. **Anticipated Schedule:**

The agricultural leases, if approved by the Montana Fish & Wildlife Commission at its October 2017 meeting, would be valid from March 1, 2018-February 28, 2023.

4. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township – included map):**

The agricultural leases are found on the CFWMA which is located just north of Townsend, MT. The leases are all found on the east side of the CFWMA on the east-side of Canyon Ferry Reservoir in Broadwater County. The leases are located in T8N R2E Sections 33 and 34, T7N R2E Sections 3, 4, 9, 16, 17 and 20.

5. **Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>677.8</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>0</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other: <u>148.1 acres in nesting cover & shelterbelts</u>	

6. **Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.**

- (a) **Permits:** No permits are needed to implement the proposed action
- (b) **Funding:** The proposed action would not require any additional MFWP funding. Work involved in administering the agricultural leases would be done as part of the regular duties associated with management of the CFWMA by MFWP

personnel. Administration of the agricultural leases on the CFWMA is one of MFWP's duties under MFWP's long-term agreement with the BOR to manage the CFWMA.

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
--------------------	-------------------------------

Bureau of Reclamation – administers property for the federal government	
---	--

MFWP - manages the CFWMA through a management agreement (No. R12MU60088, 2012) with the Bureau of Reclamation.	
--	--

7. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

The proposal is to renew the six current agricultural leases and the one existing bee yard (apiary) lease on the CFWMA. These agricultural leases have existed on the CFWMA for decades (lease acres were farmed prior to the CFWMA's creation) and as such the proposed action would retain the long-standing status quo. The agricultural leases provide food and cover for a host of wildlife species that utilize the CFWMA while also demonstrating that sustainable agricultural production can co-exist with wildlife and even benefit many wildlife species. Wildlife species that utilize the agricultural leases include waterfowl (Canada geese, a large number of duck species, etc), pheasants, white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose, occasionally elk and antelope, sandhill cranes, and a variety of other nongame wildlife and bird species.

Of the six agricultural leases, five are proposed to be cash leases, and one lease is proposed to be a payment in-kind lease (payment is in services rendered in lieu of a cash lease payment). Lessees were given a choice regarding the type of lease that they wanted for the 5-year lease period. All of the agricultural leases are farmed for a combination of hay (alfalfa) and grain with the specific amounts and percentages varying by lease. Grain crops can consist of barley, wheat, or corn and may not be harvested as a hay or silage crop. If approved by MFWP, lessees may plant an alternative crop such as sunflowers, millet, grain sorghum, canola, turnips, or any other alternative crop that is approved by MFWP instead of a conventional grain crop for one year. Planting alternative crops can improve overall soil health and help break grain disease cycles.

Hay may not be cut prior to June 25 on any of the leases. This date provides protection for nesting pheasants and waterfowl during a large portion of the nesting season while still allowing the lessees to harvest their first cutting of hay while it still has fairly high nutritional quality.

For the cash leases, the annual lease payment would be based on the number of acres to be farmed for production for the year. Lessees would be required to leave 12.5% of the amount of grain (or alternative crop) acreage produced on the lease on an annual basis as a winter food plot set-aside. The lessees would not be charged rent for the acreage included in the annual winter food plot set-aside. Several of the lessees would also be required to irrigate adjacent shelterbelts at least 3 times a year. For the in-kind lease, the lessee would be required to leave 20% of the farmed lease acres as a winter food plot in lieu of a cash lease payment. The winter food plot would either be grain, or MFWP might have the lessee plant a special game bird food plot mix.

Lease rates for the CFWMA agricultural leases would be based on the most recent three year average of reported cash rental rates for the Central Montana District, as reported/

updated by the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Lessees provide the irrigation water for the agricultural leases utilizing their own irrigation water shares. Because this value is provided by the lessees, the calculated value of the leases is based on the midpoint between irrigated and dryland cash rental rates (as reported by NASS). For 2018, the agricultural lease rate would be \$55.75/acre.

The bee yard (apiary) lease is proposed to be set at \$150/year for the 5-year lease period. During the previous lease cycle, the lessee was charged \$90/year for the bee yard lease. The bee yard lessee would not be required to perform any work for MFWP as part of the lease.

As mentioned, the agricultural lessees would be responsible for completing specific work (growing winter food plots, irrigating shelterbelts) for MFWP as part of the lease arrangement. The total cost of the cash leases would be annually discounted for work to be completed. Estimated farming costs (total operating costs) are based on the average of the three most recent years (2014-16) of available information derived from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) for the Basin and Range Region which includes the Broadwater County area. Based on other USDA data, irrigation costs were estimated to be \$100/acre/year which takes into consideration water purchase costs, pumping costs, and costs associated with replacement, maintenance, and repair of irrigation equipment. Farming and irrigation costs were estimated at \$239/acre total (\$139/acre farming costs, \$100/acre/year irrigation costs). So for the cash leases, the amount of the cash lease will be discounted at the rate of \$239.00/acre for every winter food plot set-aside acre grown and at the rate of \$100.00/acre for every acre of shelterbelts irrigated. The total estimated return to MFWP from the cash leases would be approximately \$19,000 for 2018. This number could vary depending upon which fields are seeded to hay or grain in 2018 as this would affect the winter food plot set-aside acreage amount.

If MFWP asks the lessees to do other habitat improvement work on the CFWMA during the course of the lease period, the value for that work will be determined on an as needed basis. The cost to the lessee for this additional work would be deducted from either that year's lease payment or the following year's lease payment depending upon the timing.

For the in-kind lease, the 20% total farmed acreage set-aside rate was determined to be an approximate round value in regards to the amount of acreage required to approximately balance the 2018 cash-lease payment amount against the 2018 farming cost discount rate for the set-aside acreage. Given the nature and requirements of this in-kind lease arrangement (payment for services rendered), the winter food plot set-aside acreage requirement in lieu of a cash-lease payment is proposed to be maintained at 20% of the farmed leased acreage for the duration of the 5-year lease agreement.

8. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative the agricultural leases on the CFWMA would not be renewed. This would likely have negative impacts on a variety of wildlife species that utilize CFWMA. It would also likely damage MFWP's standing or relationship with the local agricultural community and the community of Townsend as a whole.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

MFWP would renew the six existing agricultural leases and the one existing bee yard lease for 5 years (2018-2023). Agricultural leases have existed on the CFWMA for decades and as such the proposed action would retain the long-standing status quo. Managing a portion of the CFWMA as agricultural leases provides positive benefits (winter food plot set-asides, nesting cover for most of the nesting season, irrigation of existing shelterbelts, potential for lessees to do other habitat improvement work) for a variety of wildlife species that utilize the CFWMA, and it also helps improve/maintain MFWP's standing or relationship with the local agricultural community and the local community of Townsend as a whole.

9. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Park's management agreement (Management Agreement No. R12MU60088, 2012) with the Bureau of Reclamation.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Evaluation of the impacts of the No Action Alternative (Alternative A) including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical Environment.

Land Resources: If the current agricultural leases are not renewed, those acreages would no longer be irrigated which would mean that the soils would become dryer and less productive. The amount of cover would be reduced on those acres that are currently in grain production during the course of the year as there would be no actively growing planted crop. Depending upon the level of annual weed and volunteer crop growth in the existing crop residue/stubble from the previous year, there might potentially be more bare soil present during the course of the year leading to higher levels of erosion. Given the resources currently available to MFWP on the CFWMA, it would likely take MFWP several years to plant all the existing grain acreage back into some sort of suitable cover, and those areas most likely could not be irrigated by MFWP due to water right restrictions.

Air: If the No Action alternative were adopted, the current agricultural leases would not be utilized for production farming so there would be no farming activities such as plowing fields, baling hay, and combining grain crops that would produce dust. This would result in an improvement to localized ambient air quality.

Water: If the current agricultural leases were not renewed, the water rights of the current lessees that utilize Montana Ditch irrigation water and all the shareholders/water users of the Montana Ditch might be impacted. The agricultural leases on the CFWMA fall within the Montana Ditch's 'place of use.' Eliminating the agricultural leases on the CFWMA would reduce the number of irrigated acres associated with the Montana Ditch and potentially the appropriated level of water use. If the Montana Ditch water is not used on the CFWMA, it may not necessarily be available for use elsewhere. The Montana Ditch company would need to go through a water right change process to allocate the water to another location.

Vegetation: If the current agricultural leases are not renewed, those acreages that are currently productive irrigated cropland would no longer be irrigated cropland (lost agricultural acreage). This would result in an overall decrease in vegetative production on the CFWMA as the CFWMA is in a very dry moisture regime (approximately 10"-11" of precipitation per year). The existing plant community on the agricultural leases would be altered particularly on those acres that are currently in grain production. An increase in plant diversity and species abundance would likely occur as the current grain fields would likely be overtaken by a variety of mostly annual 'weedy' species. Most of these species would not be beneficial from a wildlife perspective. Planting those areas that are currently in grain production back to vegetation species that would be more beneficial to wildlife than annual weed species would require a major undertaking by MFWP both in regard to time and expense given the amount of acreage involved. In addition, MFWP would most likely not be able to irrigate those areas because of water right limitations. An increase in the abundance of noxious weeds could also be expected since the current lessees are required to control the growth and spread of noxious weeds. Noxious weeds such as Canada thistle and hounds tongue are extremely prevalent on the CFWMA. MFWP personnel are already challenged with trying to control noxious weeds on the CFWMA in those areas that are non-agricultural. If the agricultural leases are not renewed, there would be increased costs to MFWP and an increase in the amount of time spent on noxious weed control reducing the amount of time that could be spent on other work activities.

Fish/Wildlife

Not renewing the agricultural leases would have a negative impact on wildlife (game and non-game) abundance on the CFWMA for many species. The irrigated agricultural leases are heavily utilized by a wide variety of wildlife species on the CFWMA. The alfalfa fields are utilized by pheasants and waterfowl for nesting cover and forage, and by white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose, and occasionally antelope and elk, for forage. Big game species also frequently bed in the alfalfa fields. The grain fields are utilized primarily by pheasants and waterfowl species (Canada geese, duck species) for forage, particularly during the winter, and may also be utilized for nesting cover. The aforementioned big game species may also utilize the grain fields for forage on occasion. Sandhill cranes make use of the grain and alfalfa fields as well. A variety of nongame wildlife and bird species also utilize those fields. The shelterbelts that are irrigated by the agricultural lessees provide winter and nesting cover for pheasants and cover for big game species such as white-tailed deer, mule deer, and moose.

While irrigated production agricultural lands are not ideal habitat for all species of wildlife, that is the existing land use on the agricultural leases. If the current agricultural leases were not renewed, the existing plant community would be altered, particularly on those acres that are currently in grain production. An increase in plant diversity and species abundance would occur as the current grain fields would likely be overtaken by a variety of mostly annual 'weedy' species. Most of these species would not be beneficial from a wildlife perspective. Planting those areas that are currently in grain production back to vegetation species that would be beneficial to wildlife would require a major undertaking by MFWP in regard to time and expense given the acreage involved.

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action (Alternatives B) including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical Environment.

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		X	1b
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

1b - Given that the leased acres would continue to be irrigated farmland, there is the expectation that some level of both wind and water erosion would continue to occur. There would be little to no change from the current status quo in regards to overall erosion levels. Erosion levels are believed to be very low on the leases because there is very little exposed bare soil during the course of the year due to the presence of actively growing crops or crop residue, and the topography is very flat resulting in little to no run-off. The fact that the fields are irrigated also helps to prevent wind erosion. Cumulative levels of erosion are also believed to be low.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)			X			2a
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. <u>For P-R/D-J projects</u> , will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regulations? (Also see 2a.)						NA

2a. Minor localized deterioration of ambient air quality would potentially occur when there are farming activities that produce dust or pollution such as plowing fields, baling hay, and spraying pesticides or herbicides. Those events would be relatively brief in duration and localized to the fields and/or immediate areas around the fields. Cumulative impacts would be minor. All the leases contain the stipulation that lessee use of herbicides or pesticides on the leased lands be in compliance with provisions of Federal and State laws regulating such substances.

NA – Not applicable

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)						NA
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)						NA

All – There would be no change from the status quo regarding the potential impacts on water resources as the leases are currently being farmed and have been for decades. There could be potential for continued impacts of agricultural practices, such as the application of fertilizer and herbicides, on water resources. However, given the flat topography and location of the fields, run-off does not typically flow into surface water. Irrigation water for the agricultural leases comes from the Montana Ditch or Broadwater-Missouri Canal and not from groundwater wells. All the leases contain the stipulation that lessee use of herbicides or pesticides on the leased lands be in compliance with provisions of Federal and State laws regulating such substances.

NA – Not applicable

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?						NA
g. Other:						

All – There would be no change from the status quo regarding to the potential impacts (including secondary and cumulative) on the vegetation resources as the leases are currently being farmed and have been for decades. The agricultural lands that are under lease on the CFWMA pre-date the existence of the CFWMA, so the plant communities in those fields were long ago altered from the original plant community. Lessees are required to control the growth and spread of noxious weeds as a requirement of their lease.

NA – Not applicable

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)						NA
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)						NA

All – There would be no change from the status quo in regards to the potential impacts on fish/wildlife resources as the leases are currently being farmed and have been farmed for decades. Since they are part of the CFWMA, all the leases have had and will continue to have legal public access for hunting during any established hunting season that occurs on the CFWMA. The leases are also open for public recreational use throughout the year as allowed on the CFWMA.

NA – Not applicable

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Evaluation of the impacts of the No Action Alternative (Alternative A) including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Human Environment.

Noise/Electrical Effects: If the No Action alternative is selected, the existing agricultural leases would no longer be farmed, so there would be no noise produced by farm machinery on the leased areas.

Land Use: The No Action alternative would result in a major change to the existing land use, which is irrigated agricultural lands that have been in production for decades. The CFWMA is in a very dry moisture regime (10”-11” precipitation per year), so the current level of plant productivity on the existing agricultural leases depends on irrigation. Without irrigation, plant productivity would decline. Implementation of the No Action alternative would severely impact the profitability of the existing land use, as the existing lessees would no longer be able to farm those leases. They would lose the income from the commodities produced. MFWP would lose the lease fees.

Risk/Health Hazards: If the No Action alternative is selected, the potential for agricultural-related risks or health hazards, including pollution from pesticides, would be eliminated.

Community Impact: If the No Action alternative is selected, the personal incomes of the agricultural lessees would be negatively impacted as they would no longer have the income generated from their CFWMA leases.

Public Services/Taxes/Utilities: If the No Action alternative is selected, the lessees would not have the taxable income generated from the agricultural leases which may mean less local/state tax revenue. Given that the existing pivots and wheel-lines used to irrigate the agricultural leases do require energy to run, eliminating the agricultural leases would decrease energy use to a minor extent since the pivots and wheel-lines would no longer be utilized.

Aesthetics/Recreation: If the No Action alternative is selected, those areas that are currently in grain production could become weed patches that some members of the public might find aesthetically offensive. Eliminating the agricultural leases would change the character of the local neighborhood as those agricultural leases have been in existence for decades and those areas were farmed prior to the CFWMA's establishment. Not renewing the agricultural leases would have no effect on public access to those areas for consumptive and non-consumptive use as the public already has access. If the abundance of hunted wildlife species declined as a result of the elimination of the productive agricultural leases, then hunting opportunity on the CFWMA would be negatively impacted.

Cultural/Historic Resources: There would be no expected impacts related to cultural/historic resources if the No Action alternative is adopted.

Summary Evaluation of Significance for the No Action Alternative: If the No Action alternative is selected, there would be negative impacts on both the physical and human environment. However, given the limited amount of agricultural acreage involved and the number of lessees involved, the overall scope of the impacts would be minor.

Evaluation of the impacts of the Preferred Alternative (Alternatives B) including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Human Environment.

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

The status quo would be maintained in that the existing agricultural operations would continue to create noise during certain times of the year. No cumulative effects would be expected.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				7a
b. Conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

7a – Renewing the CFWMA agricultural leases would maintain the productivity and profitability of the existing land use. No cumulative impacts on land use would be expected if the leases were renewed.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X		X	8a
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X		X	8c
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)						NA

8a – While there is always the risk of a pesticide or other farm chemical spill, the amount being used or present on site at any given time is relatively small and would likely not have much of an impact on the environment. In addition, all the leases contain the stipulation that lessee use of herbicides or pesticides on the leased lands be in compliance with all provisions of Federal and State laws regulating such substances.

8c – For the lessees, working around and with agricultural machinery can be dangerous. Dust produced from farming activities such as plowing, baling hay, combining grain crops could impact individuals with breathing issues. However, those events would be relatively brief in duration and localized to the fields and/or immediate areas around the fields. The presence of the bee yard does increase the number of bees in that immediate area which could present a hazard to those individuals that are allergic to bee stings. The risk could be mitigated by signing the area to alert the public to the presence of bees in that area. However, bees are also found in other areas of the CFWMA and are a potential risk anytime one ventures outside.

Cumulative impacts associated with risk/health hazards would be expected to be very minor, if the agricultural leases are renewed.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				9c
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?			X			10b
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources						10e
f. Define projected maintenance costs.						10f

9c/10b – Renewing the existing agricultural leases would maintain the status quo in regards to the lessees earning taxable income.

10e – Lease rates for the CFWMA agricultural leases would be based on the most recent three year average of reported cash rental rates for the Central Montana District as reported/updated by the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Lessees are responsible for providing irrigation water shares for the agricultural leases. Because this value is provided by the lessees, the calculated value of the leases would be based on the midpoint between irrigated and dryland cash rental rates (as reported by NASS). For 2018, the agricultural lease rate was determined to be \$55.75/acre. The bee yard (apiary) lease would be \$150/year for the duration of the 5-year lease period. Discounting the value of the work performed (winter food plots [\$239/acre], irrigating shelterbelts [\$100.00/acre]) by the lessees from the individual lease amounts, the total estimated return to MFWP from the cash leases would be approximately \$19,000 for 2018.

10f - The proposed action would not require any additional MFWP funding. Work involved in administering the agricultural leases would be done as part of the regular duties associated with management of the CFWMA by MFWP personnel. Administration of the agricultural leases on the CFWMA is one of MFWP's duties under MFWP's long-term agreement with the BOR to manage the CFWMA.

No cumulative impacts to the community or public services/taxes/utilities would be expected if the agricultural leases were renewed.

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings?		X				11c
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)						NA

All – Renewing the agricultural leases would maintain the existing status quo.

11c - The agricultural leases are utilized by the public for hunting and other recreational purposes as they are part of the CFWMA.

No cumulative impacts to aesthetics/recreation would be expected if the agricultural leases were renewed.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)						NA

NA – Not applicable

The status quo would be maintained if the existing leases are renewed. No cumulative impacts to cultural/historic resources would be expected if the agricultural leases were renewed.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?			X		X	13b.
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)						NA
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.						NA

13b. – There are inherent potential risks and health hazards associated with farming, mostly to the individuals doing the farming. However, farming activities associated with the CFWMA agricultural leases are limited in time and space. In addition, while there is always the risk of a pesticide or other farm chemical spill involved in farming, the amount being used or present on site at any given time is relatively small and thus impacts on the environment would be extremely limited. All the leases contain the stipulation that lessee use of herbicides or pesticides on the leased lands be in compliance with all provisions of Federal and State laws regulating such substances.

NA – Not applicable

There are no expected cumulative impacts on any resources from the proposed project. Renewing the existing agricultural leases would maintain the long-standing status quo, as the CFWMA has had agricultural leases since its inception.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

This analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment from the Proposed Action. Renewing the six existing agricultural leases and the one existing bee yard (apiary) lease on the CFWMA will provide many positive benefits to both wildlife and the community. These agricultural leases have existed on the CFWMA for decades and as such the proposed action would retain the long-standing status quo. The agricultural leases demonstrate that sustainable agricultural production can co-exist with wildlife and even benefit many wildlife species. Managing a portion of the CFWMA as

agricultural leases provides positive benefits (winter food plot set-asides, bird nesting cover for most of the nesting season, irrigation of existing shelterbelts which provide wildlife cover, potential for lessees to do other habitat improvement work) for a variety of wildlife species that utilize the CFWMA, and it also helps improve and/or maintain MFWP's relationship with the local agricultural community and the local community of Townsend as a whole.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Public notices in each of these papers: Bozeman Chronicle, Helena Independent Record, Broadwater County Reporter
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days following the publication of the second legal notice in area newspapers. Written or email comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., September 22, 2017 and can be mailed or emailed to the addresses below:

Attention: Adam Grove
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
P.O. Box 998
Townsend, MT 59644
adgrove@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

No, an EIS is not required. Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment under MEPA, this environmental review revealed no significant impacts from the proposed action; therefore, an environmental assessment is deemed to be the appropriate level of analysis.

2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Adam Grove, MFWP Wildlife Biologist - Townsend

3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Wildlife Division
Responsive Management Unit
Water Rights Specialist

Bureau of Reclamation

Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area

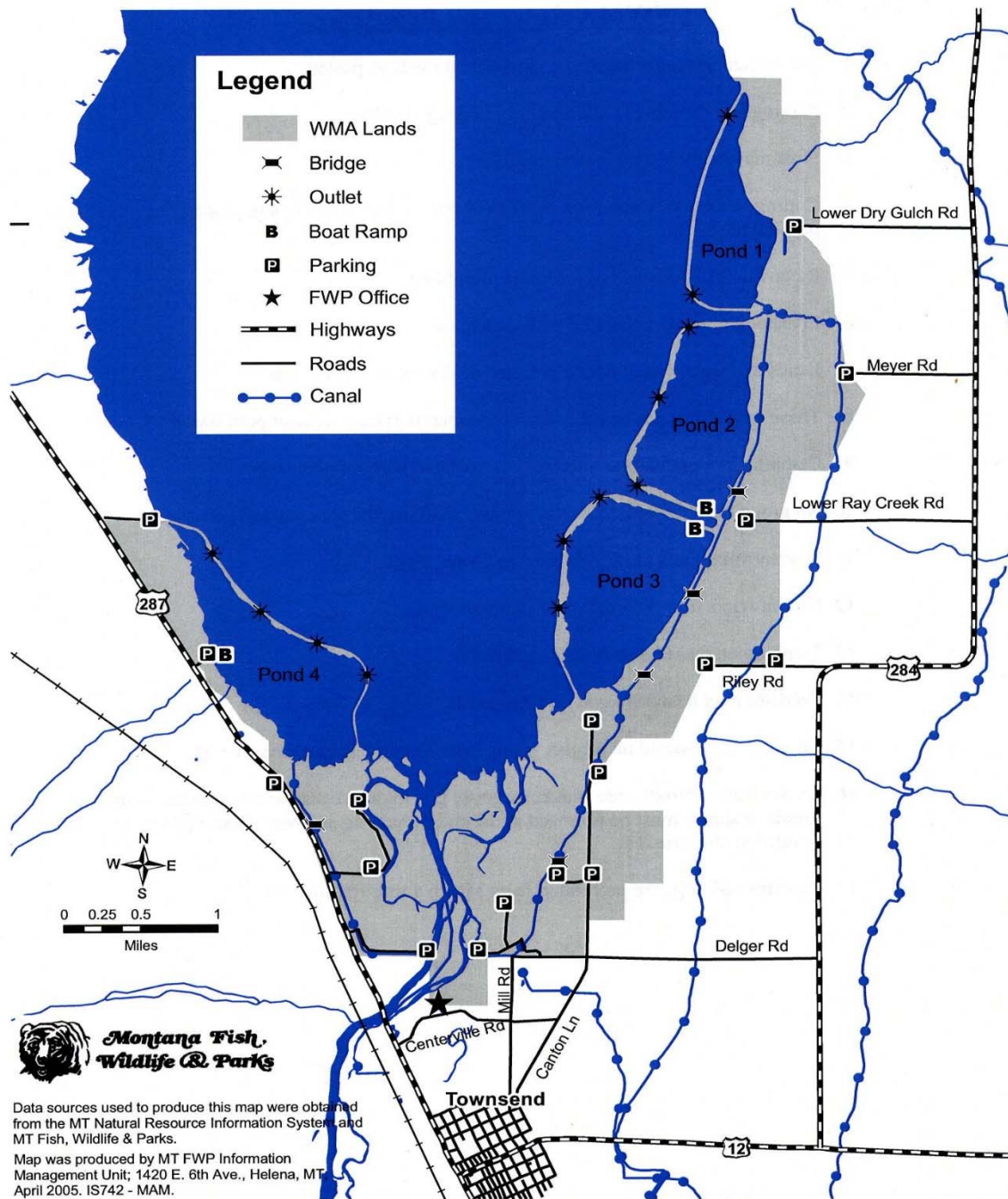


Figure 1. Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area, Townsend, Montana. Agricultural leases occur on the east side of the Wildlife Management Area

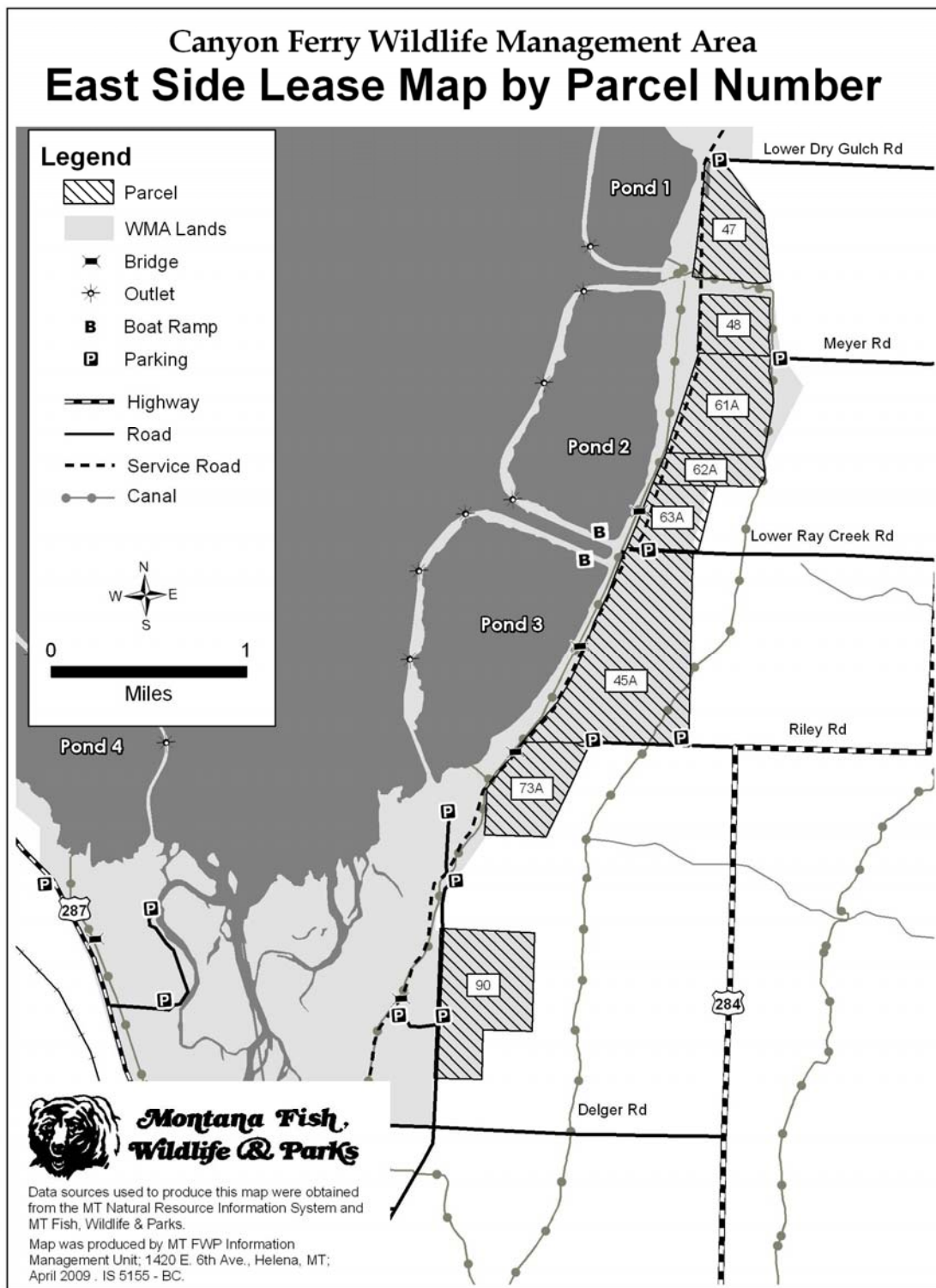


Figure 2. Map of Canyon Ferry WMA agricultural lease parcels – note parcel #61A is no longer under an agricultural lease.